
James L. Oberstar

THE SAVING ENERGY THROUGH PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ACT OF 2008

HON. JAMES L. OBERSTAR

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Together with Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Ranking Member John L. Mica and Highways and Transit Subcommittee Chairman Peter A. DeFazio, I am pleased to introduce H.R. 6052, the “Saving Energy Through Public Transportation Act of 2008”.

We are introducing this bill to promote energy savings through increased public transportation use in the United States. Recently, public transportation has experienced a renaissance in American cities and towns. In 2007, Americans took over 10.3 billion trips on public transportation, the highest level in 50 years. Public transportation use is up 32 percent since 1995, a figure that is more than double the growth rate of the population and is substantially over the growth rate for the vehicle miles traveled on our nation’s highways for that same period. All around the country, voters continue to approve state and local ballot initiatives to support public transportation, even when it means local taxes will be raised or continued.

As the price of gas approaches \$4 a gallon, even more commuters are choosing to ride the train or the bus to work rather than drive alone in their cars. Transit systems in metropolitan areas

are reporting increases in ridership of five, ten, and even 15 percent over last year's figures. Some of the biggest increases in ridership are occurring in many areas in the South and West where new bus and light rail lines have been built in the last few years.

Meeting this impressive new demand for public transportation services is no small task for our transit agencies. While record-breaking numbers of commuters are riding transit, the cost of fuel and power for public transportation has sharply increased, and the slowing economy means less local money is available to increase or even maintain transit services. This bill provides much needed support to public transportation agencies and increases incentives for commuters to choose transit options, thereby reducing their transportation-related energy consumption and reliance on foreign oil.

A primary objective of H.R. 6052, the "Saving Energy Through Public Transportation Act of 2008", is to reduce the United States' dependence on foreign oil by encouraging more people to use public transportation. According to a recent study, if Americans used public transit at the same rate as Europeans – for roughly 10 percent of their daily travel needs – the United States could reduce its dependence on imported oil by more than 40 percent, nearly equal to the 550 million barrels of crude oil that we import from Saudi Arabia each year.

To increase public transportation use across the United States, H.R. 6052, the "Saving Energy Through Public Transportation Act of 2008", authorizes **\$1.7 billion** in funding over two years for transit agencies nationwide that are temporarily reducing transit fares or expanding transit services to meet the needs of the growing number of transit commuters. The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission, established to develop a national

transportation vision to address surface transportation needs for the next 50 years, calls for a total annual investment of between \$26 billion to \$46 billion for public transportation. We consider this bill an important first step in increasing our investment in public transit infrastructure.

H.R. 6052 also increases the Federal share for clean fuel and alternative fuel transit bus, ferry or locomotive-related equipment or facilities, thereby assisting transit agencies in reducing transportation-related emissions. In fiscal years 2008 and 2009, the increased Federal share for these activities is 100 percent of the net capital cost of the project. Public transportation use is estimated to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 37 million metric tons annually. When a solo commuter switches from a single occupancy vehicle to a transit commute, this single mode shift can reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20 pounds per day – more than 4,800 pounds in a year. This provision will allow American commuters to further decrease their greenhouse gas emissions.

H.R. 6052 also extends the Federal transit pass benefits program to require that all Federal agencies offer transit passes to Federal employees throughout the United States. Current law requires that all Federal agencies within the National Capital Region implement a transit pass fringe benefits program and offer employees transit passes. This requirement originated from Executive Order 13150, signed by President Clinton on April 21, 2000. The Executive Order also required the Department of Transportation, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Energy to implement a nationwide three-year pilot transit pass benefit program for all qualified Federal employees of those agencies.

Data from the Washington Metropolitan Area Transportation Authority covering the first three years of the National Capital Region transit pass program show that more than 15,500

automobiles were eliminated from roads in the Washington, DC area as a result of Federal employees shifting their travel mode away from single occupancy vehicle (“SOV”) use to public transportation use for commuting to work. The Department of Transportation estimated that emissions and energy savings from this mode shift included the reduction of more than eight million gallons of gasoline, nearly 40,000 tons of carbon dioxide, and over 675 tons of carbon monoxide for each of the three years that they studied. DOT also studied the results of the nationwide pilot program and found that, within the three covered agencies, 11 percent of the participants shifted their travel mode away from SOV use to public transportation use for commuting to work, again producing marked energy and emissions savings, reduced congestion and cleaner air.

The Department of Transportation has determined that both the National Capital Region transit benefits program and the nationwide pilot program produce marked energy and emissions savings, congestion reductions, and cleaner air, and recommends that the transit pass benefits program be extended to Federal employees nationwide. This provision will implement the Department’s recommendation by providing more Federal employees the incentives to choose transit options, thereby reducing their transportation-related energy consumption and reliance on foreign oil.

H.R. 6052 also creates a pilot program to allow the amount expended by private providers of public transportation by vanpool for the acquisition of vans to be used as the non-Federal share for matching Federal transit funds in five communities. Under current law, only local public funds may be used as local match; this pilot program would allow private funds to be used in limited circumstances.

The provision will require the private providers of vanpool services to use revenues they receive in providing public transportation, in excess of their operating costs, for the purpose of acquiring vans, excluding any amounts that the providers may have received in Federal, State, or local government assistance for such acquisition. The Department of Transportation will implement and oversee the vanpool pilot projects, and will report back to Congress on the costs, benefits, and efficiencies of the vanpool projects.

Finally, H.R. 6052, the “Saving Energy Through Public Transportation Act of 2008”, increases the Federal share for additional parking facilities at end-of-line fixed guideway stations. This provision increases the total number of transit commuters who will have access to those facilities.

Public transportation use in all of its forms – bus, rail, vanpool, ferry, streetcar, and subway ridership to name a few -- saves fuel, reduces emissions, and saves money. The direct petroleum savings attributable to current public transportation use in the United States is 1.4 billion gallons per year. When the secondary effects of transit availability on travel are also taken into account, the equivalent of 4.2 billion gallons of gasoline is saved annually – more than 11 million gallons of gasoline per day.

Increasing public transportation use by providing incentives for commuters to choose transit options, thereby reducing their transportation-related energy consumption and reliance on foreign oil, as well as decreasing their greenhouse gas emissions, is a priority of this Congress.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to pass this important legislation.